DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 764 CS 509 022

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TITLE The Affective in Multicultural Communication.
PUB DATE 22 Apr 95
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Communication Association (Indianapolis, IN, April 19-23, 1995).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Environment; *Communication Problems; *Cultural Differences; Experiential Learning; Higher Education; *Intercultural Communication; Racial Bias; Speech Communication; *Student Reaction; Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Communication Patterns

ABSTRACT

Teaching intercultural communication differs greatly from teaching many other courses within communications and the larger curriculum. How the audience is impacted differs from most courses, and ignoring that reality short-circuits a professor's ability to maximize the learning experience. With goals of understanding and bridging cultural differences, intercultural communication, directly and indirectly, draws students to intrapersonally focus on differences; students are asked to deal with awkward or insecure aspects of themselves. In addition, learners are requested to openly communicate about sensitive personal and social differences. When dealing with the tenuous, unknown, or uncomfortable, many students use silence, glib retorts, noncommittal comments, or masking behaviors to cope. Further, there are several variables inherent in the audience dynamics of students who decide to take an intercultural communication course. These students come with gleeful enthusiasm and a rather self-aggrandizing mindset of being fully open, non-prejudiced, curious, and skilled in dealing with differences. There are times when these students seem to believe that there is little for them to learn. Powerful instructional guidance for dealing with such problems is found in P. G. Zimbardo's seminal work, "Influencing Attitudes and Changing Behaviors," which lists several suggestions for getting students to focus on their behavioral experiences or getting them involved in behavioral experiences. Learning is most fully facilitated by inviting learners' cognitive, affective, and behavioral involvement with course content. (Contains a model and nine references.) (TB)

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THE AFFECTIVE IN MULTI-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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April 22, 1995

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THE PROBLEM OF STUDENT RETICENCE

Teaching Intercultural Communication differs greatly from many other courses within the Communication and larger curriculum. How the audience of students is impacted differs from most courses, and ignoring that reality short-circuits a professor' ability to maximize the learning experience.

With goals of understanding and bridging cultural differences, Intercultural Communication, directly and indirectly, draws students to intrapersonally focusing on differences. Students are asked to deal with the awkward and insecure parts of themselves and others. Ethnic, gender, racial, religious, disabilities, and class distinctions recieve culturally general and specific attention. Facing such awarenesses frequently stimulates significant quantities of cognitive dissonance about past and current affective, cognitive, and behavioral actions and reactions.

Secondly, learners are requested to openly communication and respond about sensitive personal and social differences (Jourard, 1970). When dealing with the tenuous, unknown, or uncomfortable, many students use silence, glib retorts, noncommital comments, or masking behaviors to cope. Even though what it means to be embarrassed, lose face, or lose status can be interpreted differently in different cultures, such awkward experiences are generally believed undesirable. Such concerns frequently feed reticent behaviors that makes free-flowing discussion in Intercultural Communication classes problematic.

Thirdly, being asked to openly and directly place one's cultural baggage in front of one's own and class members' eyes stirs internal questions and external behaviors about "who and what am I; what is considered 'cool'; what is politically correct, and what, if anything, do I feel compelled to speak up for and about for my sense of self and for the identity of 'my group?'"

Finally, complicating these three factors are several variables inherent in the audience dynamics of students who decide to take an Intercultrual Communication course. Frequently, these students come with gleeful enthusiasm and a rather self-aggrandized mindset of being fully open, non-prejudiced, curious, and skilled in dealing with differences, or they come to the course, accurately or inaccurately, believing that they have really lived experiences that the others must accept. There are times there seems to be an expectation with such students there is little for them to learn. Many students are taken aback to find the disparent nature between anticipated expectations about themselves, the class, and reality. Such a contradiction often distorts or mutes productive classroom interactions. The professor and students may find they have a classroom climate that is far different from the eager, insightful, vital, validating, and discussive that adds vitality to cognitively presented course content.

With the possible exception of the professor's mind as he or she prepares to begin the course, insecurity, prejudice, confusion, and risk of norm violations lurk everywhere Problems of muted, ambivalent, uneasy students are particularly possible for professors who wish to first address the development of the course with a cognitive mindset. As teachers, we cannot make these potential difficulties evaporate, but we are aided in overcoming these resistant obstacles by drawing from what we know about (1) social-psychological, (2) rhetorical, (3) intercultural and sojourning, and (4) pedagogical research and theories about circumventing or defusing resistance.

THEORETICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

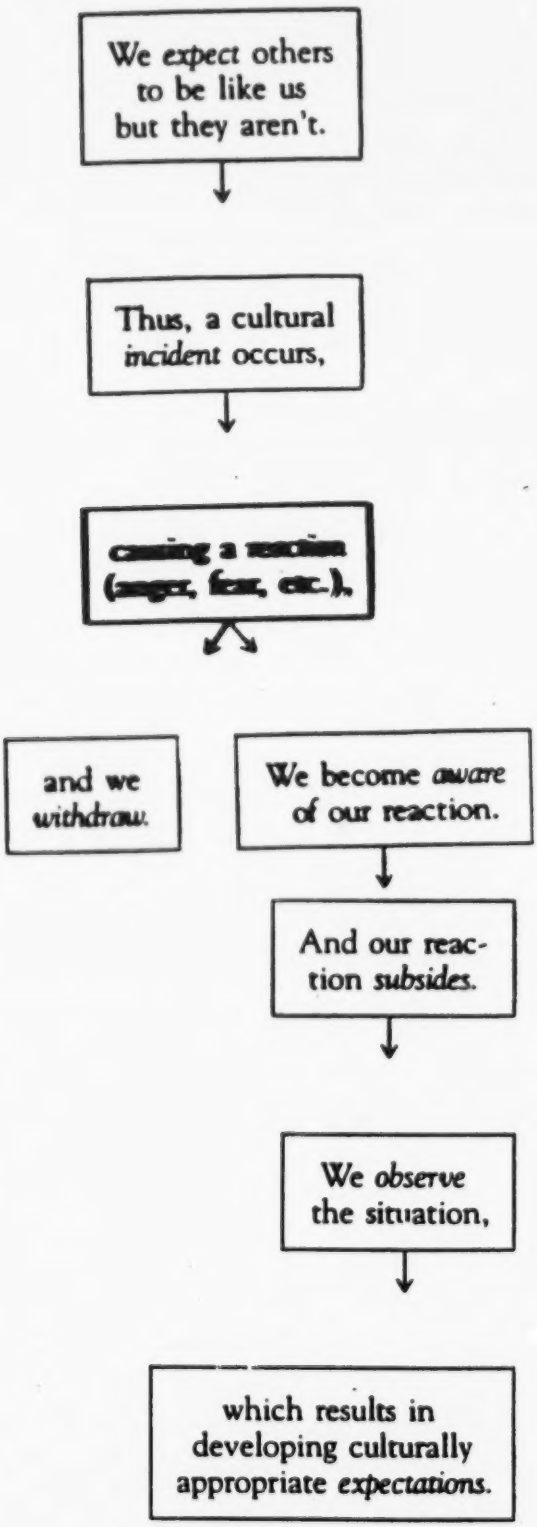
Powerful instructional guidance for dealing with reticence is found by looking at Zimabrdo, Ebbeson, and Maslach's seminal work Influencing attitudes and changing behaviors (1977). What Zimbardo and his team of researchers found were ways to side-step, or end-run, resistance. Briefly stated, the research indicated:

1. involving the participants in unexpected interaction and behaviors for the context they expect to be encounter;
2. inviting learners to become involved and open by facilitating feelings of safety and potential belonging;

3. offering these invitations (covertly or overtly) while verbally acknowledging that that the learners have options and freedom of choice about how to respond;
4. acknowledging the credibility in one's authority position, and
5. getting the student to behave in ways that are behaviorally different so that their attention is focused on their affective experiences and new behaviors rather than on a masked or sophisticated mindset they may prefer to clothe themselves in during the discussion of sensitive information.

What is so very interesting about the Zimbardo's findings on influence is how consistent the research is with many of the rhetorical application of Martin Bubers' (1958) concepts about establishing a climate that allows for dialogue and with Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin's article titled "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal For an Invitationl Rhetoric" (1995).

We know that satisfying and unsatisfying intercultural adjustment or lack of adjustment unfolds in ways similar to Craig Storti's model (1990).


We expect others to be like us but they aren't.
Thus, a cultural incident occurs,
causing a reaction (anger, fear, etc.),
and we withdraw.
We become aware of our reaction.
And our reaction subsides.
We observe the situation,
which results in developing culturally appropriate expectations.

(Storti, 1990)

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During the first days, or even the first weeks of an Intercultural Communication course, we may or may not wish to present this model immediately in its cognitive form, It is pedagogically beneficial to use the model as a conceptual framework as the professor uses the model to design experiences for the class that will highlight the model in action. Utilizing unexpected inviting classroom experiences as Zimbardo and his associate indicate is the foundation of allowing influence and change to develop. Using the students unexpected classroom experiences, which are immediate, affective, and behavioral, but not directed specifically at any cultural specific group or subgroup, frequently opens students to much freer discussion of opinions and feelings. Inductive extrapolation to specific research and theory starts from minimally guarded interactions.

Early in the course combining pedagogical basics, with Zimbardo's and Storti's research offers an exciting invitational framework for facing the issues of gaining the students' involvement while weakening discomfort and barriers to discussion and learning. As the course unfolds, Storti's model can be cognitively presented to explore and validate how tentative and ambivalent feelings and behaviors are realistic intercultural occurrences.

The Storti model connects intrapersonal experiences with interpersonal manifestations.

Finally, we pedagogically know that learning is most fully facilitated by inviting learners' cognitive, affective, and behavioral involvement with course content. Isocrates (1912), Quintillen (1875), Jung (1990), and Dewey (1991) all validate this reality. After the initial surprise of having fewer long lectures and adjusting to learning being an unpredictable experience, students readily embrace learning strategies and activities that draw forth multiple levels of involvement, variety, and an instructor's willingness to listen and help the students connect research and theory in ways that aid memory and their ability to recognize the concepts manifesting in their and others' daily actions and reactions.

There are three major challenges when seeking to achieve cognitive learning via the use of affective-behavioral learning processes. Students have a tendency to not keep up with the theoretical information in assigned readings and textbooks. The second challenge is not disturbing colleagues who are more comfortable with quiet lecture methods and who doubt the intellectual rigor of content that is presented in behavioral form. The first can be addressed by a variety of evaluation, quiz, and test methods; the second problem can be counteracted by the professor forewarning such colleague via informal conversations

while simultaneously talking research and theory. Professors of an Intercultural Communication class may further be careful that all affective and behaviroal learning experiences are processed, translated, and connected to research and theoretical discussions and notes. Requiring cognitively complex analyses and research assignments is also highly recommended.

Starting and utilizing all learning domains when teaching Intercultural Communication courses by using 'inviting' influential persuasive stategies, utilizing unexpected experiences in the classroom environment, and by seeking to shift students' affective, cognitive, and behavioral focus slightly aside from a conscious focus upon such concerns as ethnic pride, political correctness, etc. manifests greater quantities of discussion while allowing theoretical learning to be assimulated.

Capturing the attention of the students' affective and behavioral imagination is further served by carefully pre-planning the cognitive lesson plan that one expects could surface from the students' involvement in active learning processes. The careful preconception of probes and questions to help guide classroom discussion toward cognitive connections is a baseline necessity. Since such noncognitive based learning processes are less predictable than lectures, content planning requires more intense attention.

SUMMARY

The combination of theoretical conceptualizations from pedagogical, social-psychologist, rhetorical, and and intercultural theorist works as a sledge for breaking through problems with intrapersonal sensitivities, interpersonal uneasiness, and cultural prejudices. The classroom learning, reward, and vitality generated by combining these perspectives can show itself in terms of the assignment standards, the ability to invite students to deal with the "different" or "unexpected", and current and future intercultural learning and experiences.

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